

An Overview of the Seventh Wakkanai Hokusei American Study Tour

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INTRODUCTION

The purpose of this report is to provide an overview of our summer study tour to the United States in August 1996. It is hoped that the information here might prove valuable to others involved in planning or supervising similar tours in the future.

The seventh Wakkanai Hokusei Gakuen Junior College American study tour was organized to offer our students an educational intercultural experience through homestays, English study and travel in the United States. The tour group consisted of 26 members: 19 Wakkanai Hokusei students, one student's spouse, two students from other colleges, two high school students from Wakkanai, and two Wakkanai Hokusei English department faculty members as advisers. The tour departed from Wakkanai on August 6 and returned on August 25 with 17 days spent in the United States and two one-night stays in Japan due to flight connections.

STUDY TOUR OVERVIEW

The basic schedule for the study tour consisted of a ten-day visit at Eastern Mennonite University (EMU) in Harrisonburg, Virginia, followed by a week-long excursion to points of interest in the Williamsburg, Virginia and Washington, D.C. areas. Arrangements for our international travel were handled through a tourist agency here in Wakkanai, and the faculty and staff at EMU prepared the schedule for our stay in the United States.

Study tour members were assigned to homestay families in Harrisonburg based on information we forwarded to EMU prior to the tour in the form of a personal information sheet on each participant. On these sheets, the tour members had the opportunity to express interests and preferences as well as any special information that might have a bearing on their homestay assignments. Upon arrival in Harrisonburg, the study tour members were picked up by their assigned families and taken directly to their homes.

For the ten-day stay in Harrisonburg, a daily schedule of English conversation study and various activities in the Harrisonburg area was developed. The regular schedule called for English study in the mornings and activities in the afternoon, and it was flexible enough to allow for changes when necessary due to inclement weather or unexpected time conflicts. The weekend was set aside as free time for the tour members to spend with their host families.

The tour group was broken up into two 12-member classes for the English conversation portion of the program. Each class studied English conversation through a variety of activities such as question and answer drills, role-playing, music and games. Each tour member also prepared a short speech in English for presentation at the closing ceremony on the last night of our stay in Harrisonburg.

During the final week of the tour, the group traveled by chartered bus and stayed in motel or dormitory style accommodations in the evenings. Visits to places of historical interest were planned, and side trips to a beach, an amusement park, and two stage plays were included. There was also free time provided for shopping and individual sightseeing.

An EMU faculty member and a student assistant traveled with us for the bus trip portion of the tour. They handled all arrangements concerning the bus and our accommodations, and they assisted us in any way that they could during the week of travel. They also accompanied us to the airport on the day of our departure for Japan.

STUDY TOUR DIARY

Tuesday, August 6

Tour members arrived at Wakkanai Airport at 1 p.m. for the 2:10 p.m. flight to Tokyo Haneda Airport aboard All Nippon Airways (ANA) Flight 896. Upon arrival at Haneda, the group boarded a bus to travel to the Narita ANA Hotel near Narita Airport. The accommodations at the Narita ANA Hotel included dinner and breakfast meal coupons and a choice of restaurants for the evening meal.

Wednesday, August 7

The group gathered at the ANA counter in the hotel lobby at 8:30 a.m. to check in baggage for the international flight. At around 9:35 a.m. the group left by bus for Narita Airport Terminal 2. ANA Flight 002 departed from Japan for the United States at 11:10 a.m.

Due to the time change as we traveled west to east, the flight arrived at Dulles International Airport in the Washington, D.C. area at 10:50 a.m. also on August 7. We were met at the airport by members of the EMU faculty and staff, and we traveled nonstop to Harrisonburg by bus. We had planned to stop for lunch on the way there, but we decided to return directly in order to arrive by 2:30 p.m., the time scheduled for the host families to pick up our tour members. Within 30 minutes of our arrival at EMU, all of the tour members had been introduced to their host families and were on their way to their families' homes.

Thursday, August 8

After their first night's rest in the United States, the tour members met on the campus of EMU at 8:00 a.m. for some brief words of welcome from the EMU administration and an orientation session. This was followed by a walking tour of the campus. After a break, the group participated in the first English conversation class. Lunch began at 11:45 a.m. and was served in the cafeteria of the neighboring Eastern Mennonite High School due to work in progress at the EMU dining hall. At 1:00

p.m. the group traveled by EMU vans to a local pool for an afternoon of swimming and returned to EMU at 5:00 p.m. to meet their host families.

Friday, August 9

The group met at 8:30 a.m. for a morning of English study and the first part of a lecture on American culture from an EMU professor. After lunch a trip to a frontier culture museum was planned, but this had to be canceled because of heavy rain and was replaced with a shopping trip to the local mall. The tour members returned to EMU to meet their host families around 5:30 p.m.

Saturday and Sunday, August 10 and 11

These days were set aside as free time for the tour members to spend with their host families. Many visited scenic places in the Harrisonburg area over the weekend, and several attended church services on Sunday morning.

Monday, August 12

The group met at 8:30 a.m. for English conversation study. This was followed by a science lecture on wildlife in the Virginia area from an EMU science professor. The lecture was held in an auditorium-style lecture hall in the science building that is filled with the mounts of a wide variety of animals. After lunch the group again traveled to the mall for a scheduled afternoon of shopping and returned to EMU at 5:00 p.m.

Tuesday, August 13

The group met at 8:30 a.m. for English conversation class followed by the second part of the American culture lecture begun on Friday. After lunch the original schedule called for an afternoon of tubing on an area river, but again some unseasonably wet and cool weather forced us to change our schedule. Tubing was replaced by a trip to Endless Caverns, one of several cavern attractions in the Harrisonburg area. The group traveled by van to the caverns and took the hour and a half tour. There was also time for some shopping in the gift shop while we were waiting for the tour to begin. The group returned to EMU around 5:00 p.m.

Wednesday, August 14

Wednesday's schedule was special due to a tour of local churches scheduled for the morning hours. After a short presentation by an EMU faculty member, the group went to the EMU library to watch a film on Judaism. The schedule had originally included a visit to a local synagogue, but schedule conflicts prevented this. The group then traveled by van to a Catholic church in downtown Harrisonburg for a interesting presentation and tour. The Catholic church has built a new sanctuary in recent years and our group had the chance to see and compare the new and old sections of the church. The next stop was a visit to an Old Order Mennonite church and community outside of Harrisonburg. The Old Order community still uses horse-drawn transportation, and after the Mennonite pastor's presentation inside the church building, one tour member actually had the opportunity to ride with him in his buggy. The group was also given a tour of the pastor's harness shop, where gear for the community's horses and carriages is made and repaired. There was also a short visit to a nearby two-room schoolhouse for those who were interested in looking inside.

The group returned to EMU for lunch and an afternoon English conversation session. After class, the group had some extra free time during the afternoon beginning around 3:30 p.m.

Thursday, August 15

The group met for English study at 8:30 a.m. A tour of the museum in the science building was scheduled for the morning lecture time, but a scheduling slip-up kept us out of the museum and left us with about 45 minutes of unexpected free time. Our afternoon schedule had called for a visit to another set of caverns in the Harrisonburg area, but since the weather had improved and we had already visited Endless Caverns on Tuesday, we decided to change the schedule to a trip to the Shenandoah National Park for a picnic lunch and some hiking. We left EMU around noon by van with bag lunches prepared by the EMU food service and arrived at a picnic spot off the Skyline Drive in the park around 1:00 p.m. We spent the afternoon hiking and sightseeing in the park and returned to Harrisonburg around 5:00 p.m.

Friday, August 16

This was our last day in Harrisonburg. The morning followed the usual English conversation and cultural lecture schedule. The lecture by another EMU faculty member was an introduction to the Williamsburg and Washington, D.C. areas which we would visit during the next week. Lunch was served in the EMU dining hall for the first time. After lunch the group had free time or, as an option, the visit to the science museum that had been postponed on Thursday.

At 6:00 p.m. the tour members and their host families gathered in a special meeting hall overlooking the EMU campus for a farewell dinner and closing ceremony. The tour members sang two English songs that they had practiced in conversation class, and each member presented a short English speech about their visit in Harrisonburg. Each member also received a certificate for their completion of the conversation class and a gift from EMU. The evening ended with the singing of a hymn sung to the tune of the traditional Japanese song "Sakura."

Saturday, August 17th

The tour members gathered at EMU at 8:30 a.m. to board a chartered bus for the trip to the Williamsburg area. The bus would be our transportation for the remainder of the tour, and it was easily large enough to hold our entire group plus our luggage. Our host families had provided bag lunches for the tour members, and we stopped around noon at a rest stop to eat.

In the early afternoon, we arrived at our first tourist stop, the Jamestown Festival Park. This park has a museum with historical information about the Jamestown settlement and also has an outdoor area with re-creations of dwellings, buildings and ships. After about a two hour visit here, we traveled on to the colonial area of Williamsburg. This is the section of the city of Williamsburg that has been restored over the years to the architecture of colonial times. In Colonial Williamsburg, we had about three hours of free time to explore the historical area and shops and to have dinner on our own. Our EMU guides also offered an informal walking tour for those who wished to take it.

We left for our motel at about 6:30 p.m. Although we had an evening visit to a pottery business scheduled, we decided that free time to rest was in order after such a full day.

Sunday, August 18

We left the motel by bus at around 8:30 a.m. and had breakfast on our own at some fast-food restaurants in Williamsburg. Our next activity was a visit to Busch Gardens near Williamsburg, and we arrived there around 10:00 a.m. Busch Gardens is a large amusement park, and the tour members spent the day enjoying a variety of rides, shows and shops. We left Busch Gardens at 4:30 p.m. and drove to the Williamsburg Christian Retreat Center. This is a church camp facility in the Williamsburg area, and we had rooms reserved in their dormitory for Sunday and Monday nights. After check-in we gathered in the center's dining room for dinner, and the evening was set aside as free time to rest or roam the grounds and take advantage of the recreation areas for tennis, basketball and frisbee.

Monday, August 19

After breakfast in the dining room, we left the retreat center at 9:00 a.m. for Virginia Beach. The group enjoyed about three hours of swimming and sunbathing there. Around 2:00 p.m. we left for a mall in the Virginia Beach area and spent the remainder of the afternoon there with free time for shopping and dinner. In the late afternoon we returned to the retreat center and had free time for the rest of the evening.

Tuesday, August 20

After breakfast we boarded the bus for the drive to the Washington, D.C. area. We arrived at the Potomac Mills mall south of Washington before noon. Potomac Mills is a huge outlet mall with over 200 stores. We had lunch on our own there and spent several hours shopping. We left the mall at around 4:00 p.m. for our motel in the Crystal City area of Washington. After check-in and a short rest, we traveled by bus to a seafood restaurant on the Potomac River for dinner. Our tour members chose entrees such as lobster, crab and shrimp, and some members enjoyed

oversized slices of cake for dessert. After dinner we boarded the bus for a night tour of downtown Washington. The monuments and buildings were clearly illuminated and almost larger than life against the evening sky. We also decided to stop for a short walking tour of the Jefferson Memorial before returning to the motel.

Wednesday, August 21

After breakfast on our own, the group left the motel by bus at 9:00 a.m. for the U.S. Capitol Building. After a guided tour of the Capitol, the group walked to Union Station for lunch and shopping on our own. Union Station has been remodeled in recent years and contains a variety of shops and restaurants. At 1:30 p.m. we boarded the bus for a short ride to the Washington Monument and a scheduled tour stop there. After the Washington Monument, tour members were free to explore the other monuments on the Mall on their own. At about 4:00 p.m. the group gathered at the Lincoln Memorial to meet the bus and return to the motel.

After dinner on our own in the motel area, we again boarded the bus for the ride to the Kennedy Center where we attended a performance of the Broadway play Beauty and the Beast. The tour members dressed nicely for this special occasion and were treated to an excellent performance.

Thursday, August 22

After breakfast on our own, the group departed on foot at 9:30 a.m. for a nearby subway stop to ride into downtown Washington. The morning and afternoon hours of this day were loosely scheduled as this was our last full day in the United States. Everyone visited a duty-free shop as the first stop of the morning. Some tour members spent a good bit of time and money here in order to buy gifts for their return to Japan. From here the tour members went on their own for sightseeing and shopping with a deadline of 3:00 p.m. to return to the motel. Some members used this free time to visit the Smithsonian Institution.

After returning to the motel and again dressing up for an evening out, the tour members left at around 4:00 p.m. by bus for a dinner theater in the suburban

Washington, D.C. city of Laurel, Maryland. The evening at the Burnbrae Dinner Theater began around 6:00 p.m. with a buffet-style dinner, and the performance of the Gershwin musical Crazy for You began around 8:00 p.m. Most of our group was seated directly in front of the stage, and thanks to the compact space and neighborly atmosphere of the theater, these were perhaps the best seats in the house. After the show we boarded the bus and returned directly to the motel. It was a long night for some tour members as they struggled to find space for all of their belongings and gifts in their heavily packed bags.

Friday and Saturday, August 23 and 24

The group boarded the bus at 9:00 a.m. for the drive to Dulles International Airport. We were accompanied through the check-in process and to our gate by our guides from EMU. The tour members took advantage of the time remaining before the flight to make a few last-minute purchases at the duty-free shop in the airport. Our flight to Tokyo was ANA Flight Number 001, and it departed as scheduled at 12:00 noon.

We arrived at Narita Airport in the Tokyo area on Saturday, August 24, at about 3:00 p.m. After everyone cleared customs, we boarded a bus for the short ride to the Narita ANA Hotel where we would again stay to wait for our flight to Wakkanai on Sunday. We checked in and were given meal coupons for dinner and breakfast.

Sunday, August 25

We left the hotel by bus at about 8:30 a.m. for the ride to Haneda Airport and our flight to Wakkanai. After our arrival at Haneda and the completion of checking in, we had some free time to visit the shops in the airport. We departed from Haneda at 11:45 a.m. on ANA Flight Number 895 and arrived in Wakkanai at 1:30 p.m.

SOME SUGGESTIONS

Although our tour proceeded very smoothly for the most part, there were occasional problems. Here are some suggestions based on our experiences that might be useful to advisers of future tours of this type.

It is advisable to bring copies of all information that you have forwarded to your tour hosts during the preparation time for the tour. We had an instance where a list sent by e-mail for the breakdown of our tour members into English classes was not readily available when needed. This could easily have been printed out at our school and brought with us.

Also along the lines of important information to bring, it is suggested that the advisers of the tour bring a photocopy of each tour member's passport. If a passport were to be lost, a photocopy could be vital to help the replacement process along as you deal with the appropriate authorities. We did have a passport that was lost temporarily, and our lack of a photocopy added to the uncertainty we felt as we contemplated contacting the Japanese Embassy. Fortunately the passport was found before we made any calls.

When we stayed at the church camp, each room had a lock, and it was possible to lock yourself out of your room. The camp had a front desk, but this desk closed around 8:00 p.m., and after this time, there was only an emergency telephone number available if you needed some assistance in the dormitory. Unfortunately for us, there were two occasions when some of our participants locked themselves out of their rooms after hours. We were able to resolve these situations without using the emergency number, but a suggestion for future stays of this type would be that the advisers of the tour have some kind of master key made available to them to use in case of careless lockouts.

We had an excellent schedule of activities prepared for us by EMU, but true to the nature of summertime schedules, several changes had to be made during the course of the tour. It is suggested that the advisers of a tour remain flexible in regards to the unexpected where the tour schedule is concerned and to encourage an attitude of flexibility in the tour members as well. Also, the advisers and the hosts should keep optional indoor activities in mind in case summer showers wash out planned outdoor activities. We were fortunate during our tour that in spite of some unexpectedly heavy rain, we were able to replace some outdoor activities with interesting indoor ones, and we were also able to move things on our schedule to take advantage of good weather when we had it.

IN CLOSING

Our tour seemed to succeed in providing an interesting and educational travel experience for our participants. Although there was no formal evaluation of the tour members' experiences, the opinions they have expressed informally have been very positive. Overall the tour benefited from the positive attitudes and flexibility of the individual tour members and from some good luck in a couple of situations where major problems seemed to be developing. The experience of the EMU faculty and staff in planning and conducting tours of this type played a large role in our success, and we were also fortunate to have experienced leadership from our own school in the person of Assistant Professor Michiyuki Minami, who was participating in his fifth summer study tour as an adviser.